



Connecticut Council of Language Teachers

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischman, and members of the Education Committee, I am writing to state my concerns and strong objection to Bill #944.

My name is Jaya Vijayasekar; I serve as the president of the Connecticut Council of Language Teachers, representing world language professionals and students in the state of Connecticut. On behalf of the CT COLT Board of Directors and its constituents, I need to express my disappointment in the omission of a world language requirement in this bill. The reform plan which was approved by the State Board of Education addresses "a superior education for 21st century learners"; it propounds that "living and competing successfully in a global society and economy will require an understanding of our interconnectedness"; it supports the "acquisition of 21st century skills; With such a mission, the omission of a world language requirement in Bill 944 is an anomaly and extremely difficult to comprehend.

The Committee for Economic Development has declared that "in order to confront the 21st century challenges to our economy and national security, our education system must be strengthened to enhance the foreign language skills and cultural awareness of our students." The U.S. will become less competitive due to the deficit in strong foreign language programs. In the AUG 2006 issue of the American School Board Journal, Susan Black in her article, "Tongue tied Students" underscores the high priority that needs to be placed on language learning.

This bill grossly neglects one of Howard Gardner's critical intelligences for the present era and it is what Gardner calls, "cultural intelligence. According to Kyra Nesteriak of CBIA, 1200 foreign owned companies have chosen to invest in Connecticut; they employ our citizens, set up operations and pay taxes here. To interact well with the many that have chosen CT to do business with, it helps most to know how to speak their languages, to know about our own cultural style and how our cultural style meshes with the cultures of others.

While early language study is valuable, Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle's study in 1978 show that adolescents and adults have advantages in some areas of language acquisition; according to research by Birdsong in 1992 and Birdsong

and Molis in 2001, we have to take many factors into account and adolescent learners can achieve native-like proficiency. The AERA report on "Research points in foreign language instruction," states that language teaching should be age appropriate and that while early instruction leads to native like fluency, young adolescents, and our **HIGH SCHOOL** students have the **COGNITIVE** ability to grasp the grammar and develop their language skills in a way appropriate to their skills. Older students in fact require grammar and structure along with meaning and conversation. So, these students will **MOST** definitely benefit by their language study at the high school level.

Manuela Wagner of UCONN, shares that Cooper's study in 1987 and Garfunkel and Tabor's in 1991 conducted in middle and high schools indicate that foreign language study **improves test scores in social studies, language arts, and math and verbal portions of the SAT.** CT COLT past president, Barbara Lindsey shares that two or more years of foreign language instruction provides greater access to quality post-secondary institutions.

Research presented by the Center for Applied Linguistics cites studies which prove that apart from an early start and a well articulated program, a **STRONG** policy in support of language instruction is the most influential factor in creating and sustaining language programs. In all European countries, at least one foreign language is compulsory. Maintaining a requirement will foster a rigorous approach to curriculum development, professional development, and assessment, which are all essential for successful programs.

I would like to see Connecticut lead the way along with several other states which already have a language requirement in place. We have flagship programs that draw visitors from around the world and we would like to continue to hold that prestigious position.

Bill #944 has a serious deficit which must be remedied before it could be endorsed by this Education Committee. Thank you again for this opportunity to speak with you.

Sincerely,

Jaya Vijayasekar
President, CT COLT